A STUDY OF ANTI-PETRARCHISM IN SELECTED POEMS OF JOHN DONNE

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The poetry of John Donne was, in a sense, rediscovered in the twentieth century. Perhaps, this revival of interest in Donne's work might be traceable to the similarities between these times and the times in which Donne lived. Just as poets of today are searching for the truth of emotional experience, the world of John Donne searched for the truth of emotional experience. The seventeenth century in England can well be described as an age of inquiry - an age in which man began to question all fundamental institutions. Indeed, there were political, social, and religious re-appraisals. Man became interested in knowing not alone the "why of things" but the "how of things" as well. Thus, scientific experiments were performed and methods of scientific inquiry were introduced. In a special sense, Donne's poetry reflects the scientific temper of his age. On this account, the twentieth century, pre-eminently an age of science, perhaps feels a certain kinship with John Donne. And it is for this reason that a great poet who has long deserved special consideration is now being accorded that special consideration. The objective of this particular inquiry into Donne's poetry is to analyze the anti-Petrarchan themes which are, I think, the special mark of Donne's poetry.

From the beginning of recorded literature women have been variously portrayed. Examples are the deceptive Delilah, the noble Ester, the cruel Medea and the vindictive Clytemnestra. Not until the days of Francesco Petrarch, the Italian humanist who became one of the bulwarks of the Renaissance, did this variableness in portraying women approach a somewhat standardized pattern. Petrarch seems to have fathered the idea of portray-

ing women in a benign and even idealistic manner. This pattern of glorifying women in romantic poetry became a substantial feature of literary practice and lasted with certain exceptions until the arrival of John Donne upon the English literary scene. That the Petrarchan manner constituted the rule in English romantic poetry can be proved by the poems of Wyatt, Surrey, Spencer, and Sidney. Thus, by and large, the Petrarchan tradition prevailed in English romantic poetry for over two hundred years until in the last decade of the sixteenth century John Donne rose in rebellion against it with his Songs and Sonets and his "Love Elegies."

In the pages to follow, selected poems of Donne have been examined, analyzed and interpreted with emphasis on Donne's departure from the well honored Petrarchan tradition in English poetry. Moreover, in order to gain perspective into Donne's revolt against Petrarchism, I have also examined the nature of Petrarchism and its development in English poetry during the sixteenth century, and certain pertinent factors in the life of Donne himself.

It is hoped that this study will serve to stimulate continued interest in Donne's poetry, aid in the understanding of his revolt against the Petrarchan tradition, and establish the fact that Donne not only departed from the Petrarchan tradition, but instituted a tradition of realism in English poetry.

CHAPTER I

THE NATURE OF PETRARCHISM AND ITS DEVELOPMENT IN ENGLISH POETRY DURING THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

Not only did Francesco Petrarch, the Italian poet and humanist inaugurate "the mighty movement of the Renaissance from which modern civilization takes its rise,"[1] but he also introduced a style of his own for the presentation of women in poetry. Petrarch, in his love sonnets to Lady Laura, set a pattern which remained popular for over two hundred years after his death; for as Fletcher observes, "he securely established not only the form but also the theme for the continental sonnet."[2] Thus when Petrarch selected the sonnet as the chief medium for his love verse it became the form which was later introduced into English literature by Wyatt and Surrey during the reign of Henry the Eighth. In order to understand the nature of Petrarchism, which influenced both the content and form of English love poetry, it is necessary to review briefly the love conventions employed both by the troubadours and by Dante and show how Petrarch was in turn influenced by their poetry.

The troubadours, minstrels in the south of France during the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries, wrote and sang principally of love, chivalry, and gallantry according to the conventions of courtly love. These courtly love conventions dictated that the knight - in the presence of the lady - regard his lover with abiding veneration and unswerving devotion. Moreover, these courtly conventions called for exaggerated gallantry in demeanor and often included violent physical after-effects like fainting, bodily quaking, sleeplessness, and loss of appetite. What

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[1] Oscar Kuhns, The Greatest Poetry of Italy (New York, 1903), p. 119.

[2] Jefferson Fletcher, Literature of the Italian Renaissance (New York, 1934), p. 217.

is more, these conventions dictated that the lady show indifference and that the man brood over the indifference. These courtly love conventions reached their fullest development during the days of Eleanor of Acquitaine,[1] a proponent of courtly love. So well established was this convention that Andreus Capellanus prepared a book De Amore libre tres which encompassed the practices of which the troubadours sang.[2] These practices included an enumeration of the virtues required of the knight who aspired to be a lover and announced as an outstanding tenet of the cult of courtly love the incompatibility of love with marriage, even though the lady was usually married to someone other than her lover and often to his overlord. These traits are perhaps nowhere better delineated than in Lu Emily Pearson's book on Elizabethan Love Conventions. According to Pearson the knight

> ...became the lady's vassal and protested absolute submission and devotion to her.
> ...gave his lady power over his life or death.
> ...vowed his love to surpass all other things in value.
> ...was made rich by the slightest token from his lady and
> ...adored her as a divinity commending himself to her with crossed hands and bowed head....[3]

The troubadours expressed these conventions in their poetry and eventually their influence reached Italy. There the worship of women acquired religious overtones and was identified with the cult of the worship of the Virgin Mary. One imitator of the convention of the troubadours in Italy was Dante. There was, however, a difference in the writings of Dante and in the writing of the troubadours. The French troubadour exalted his lady

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[1]Eleanor of Acquitaine (1122-1204). Queen of Louis VII of France (married 1137, divorced 1152) and of Henry II of England (1152-1204). She was known as "Damsel of Brittany."

[2]Lu Emily Pearson, Elizabethan Love Conventions (New York, 1933), p. 5.

[3]Ibid.

whether he loved her as a princess or as a patroness. Dante, however, placed his loved one high above earthly beings. In emphasizing his loved one's spirituality, Dante was able to embody in his Beatrice all that was perfect. To Dante, Beatrice symbolized virtue of the highest order. Thus Dante was inspired to exalt his affection for her into a passion that was pure, idealistic, and supra-human. Dante celebrated his love for Beatrice in La Vita Nuova and in the Divina Commedia. In the latter work, he paid Beatrice the greatest homage ever paid to a mortal woman. He made her his guide through Paradise.

From the troubadours and from Dante, Petrarch acquired many of the patterns for his sonnets. With Petrarch, however, poetry was no longer just a matter of chivalrous ideals as with the troubadours or of symbolism and philosophy, as with Dante, but the expression of genuine feeling.[1] Petrarch's poems were, according to Pearson, "about half-way between Dante's love poetry and that of the troubadours."[2] Petrarch made Laura somewhat like Beatrice, but he kept her completely human. Thus, his Laura unlike Beatrice was "a woman of flesh and blood - beautiful and virtuous but not ethereal and mystical."[3] After her death, Laura became the object of an ideal love but she always retained an earthly human significance.

Petrarch lauds his Laura in most of his three hundred and seventeen sonnets which have been compiled and published in a book called Canzoniere. Petrarch's loved one is generally held to be Laura de Noves who was born at Avignon in 1309, was married in 1325 to Hugh de Sede and died of the

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[1]Kuhns, Op. Cit., p. 126.

[2]Pearson, Op. Cit., p. 30.

[3]Kuhns, Op. Cit., p. 126.

plague in 1384. She was the mother of eleven children. Some critics, on the other hand, hold that Laura never really existed at all except in the mind of the poet. However, Petrarch always denied such charges; and, the poems themselves by the very strength of feeling and imagery suggest that Laura was a real person. For Petrarch describes real things-Laura's beauty, her coldness, her indifference, his distress and especially the feeling which pained his soul. According to Kuhns, "Petrarch saw Laura for the first time in 1327 and worshipped her for twenty-one years from a respectful distance."[1] Though his sonnets, like Dante's were arranged in a sequence to record his love story, and to describe its progress, Petrarch included little story or action in the sonnets. The story that was related told of a love which was human, even earthly but restrained by the honor and virtue of the beautiful lady.[2] It has been traditional to divide the sonnets into two major parts, those written while Laura was alive and those written after her death. Interspersed with the sonnets are other lyrical forms such as the ode, the madrigal, and the ballad. Much of Petrarch's poetry concerned itself with the shortness of earthly life, the inevitableness of death, and the end of all that is fair on earth. These matters are naturally related to Laura. Petrarch depicts through his vivid imagination his hopes and despairs; and he sees his love reflected in the season of the years, the coming of day and night, the relationships between heaven and earth. Kuhns writes that "some poems are exquisite pictures of Laura's beauty with a charming landscape as a setting all presented in an atmosphere of lovely poetry, full of tenderness and genuine feeling."[3]

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[1] Ibid., p. 128.

[2] Pearson, Op. Cit., p. 33.

[3] Kuhns, Op. Cit., p. 128.

In some sonnets Petrarch praises the physical beauty of Laura and these descriptions later became the model for the poets who followed his tradition. Lu Emily Pearson writes

> ...Petrarch made much of the eyes of his mistress.... Her eyes[1] are sweet and kind, beaming with unconquered glances like stars.... They reflect the brightness of Heaven brilliant, ardent, enchanting, twin stars tranquil through their celestial radiance. Her face is resplendent with the sweetness showered on it and is the brightest the sun ever shone on, and the silver golden tresses, radiant as those of some sylvan queen or fountain nymph, made the flashing noon day sun darken with envy as the wind blows them into a thousand ringlets and shows their burnished gold. Above the arching jets brows and the jet lashes, the starry forehead is more fair than summer skies.... The cheeks, like fair roses... are soft and the lips form an angelic smile; the breast, fair and young, pure and angelic; the skin, roses and dew.... He praises her hand so snowy and soft, her arm so finely rounded and smooth, and he exclaims that her form is that of an angel with unexampled grace, her step that of a goddess... her walk, her look, her words, her air, her every action divine.[2]

In other sonnets, Petrarch cherishes the hope that Laura will relent with time, thinks that he will perish unless she relents, accuses her of hardness, entreats her not to hate him, confides to his friend her variableness and his despair, recounts the causes of his woe, argues with his heart, and protests that he can endure no longer her extreme whims. Thus, he created the vogue of treating in an exaggerated fashion the virtues of a beloved woman.

The sonnet, created in the eleventh century in the Provence, was therefore adopted by Petrarch as the medium through which he expressed his noble feelings for Laura. Thus, the Petrarchan sonnet[3] was born. Petrarch was

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[1]The lines are mine - put there for emphasis.

[2]Pearson, Op. Cit., pp. 35-36.

[3]Such a sonnet consisted of fourteen lines - an octave and a sestet, rhyming a b b a a b b a c d c d c d or a b b a a b b a cde cde and was written in iambic pentameter. The eighth and sixth lines were usually in some measure parallel, sometimes expressing a thought in two different ways, sometimes devoting the sestet to commentary on the thought developed in the octave. Hardin Craig, Shakespeare (New York, 1931), p. 118.

very adept at using the sonnet form to express a complete idea. In addition to form, Petrarch mastered the flow and sound of the Italian language.

Analysis of form and language alone will not yield full knowledge of Petrarch's power in poetry. Through his choice of theme, he was able to select subjects which like his form endured. His theme, of course, was love and he made the stock figures of the unapproachable lady and the despairing lover indispensable for many generations of young poets. To Petrarch love seemingly implied a desire to unite with the beautiful. Robinson notes that Petrarch defends the higher concept of love.[1] Love for Petrarch was the worship of beauty and virtue, and the subject of love was the person of the loved one. As Auslander puts it, Petrarch is cherished as the great poet of love.[2] It is thought that though Petrarch saw both sides of love - its spiritual beauty appealing to the inner senses and its physical beauty inviting delight in itself - he lacked the fusing element. In his poems, the physical and the spiritual remain separate.

From Petrarch, the following code for the courtly or conventional lover was set; constancy in love, service to one's lady, praise of her physical beauty, modest declarations of his love, abstention from follies and silliness, and emphasis on worthiness, discretion, and prudence. It might be well to note that often, if not always, in keeping with the courtly love tradition the lady was married. Petrarch's unique contribution is that he

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[1]James Robinson, Petrarch: The First Modern Scholar and Man of Letters (New York, 1909), p. 92.

[2]Joseph Auslander, The Sonnets of Petrarch (New York, 1932), p. 4.

invested the old troubadour theme of courtly love with a Dante-like idealism and a matchless perfection of form.

It was this kind of love poetry that Wyatt and Surrey imported into England. Wyatt was known initially for his translations of Petrarch.[1] In his own poetry, Wyatt, like all Petrarchists, complains to his lady and uses conceits in which he burns, freezes, hopes, and despairs at one and the same time.[2] According to Grierson, "when Wyatt visited Rome, Petrarchism was the fashion and it was Petrarch whom Wyatt took for his model."[3] Though Wyatt often departed from the set rime scheme of fourteen iambic pentameter lines by ending his sonnets with a final couplet, he otherwise remained true to the Petrarchan pattern. In his sonnets he selected such subjects as "The Lover Compareth His State to a Ship," "Descriptions of the contrarious Passions in a Lover," and "The Lover Showeth How He Is Forsaken of Such as He Sometimes Enjoyed." Moody and Lovett observe that "with Petrarch's imitators the sonnet became a literary exercise, devoted to the expression of a love which might be entirely imaginary or directed toward an imaginary person."[4] They further comment that "Wyatt's sonnets need not be regarded as having strict biographical truth though attempts have been made to find in them the history of a personal relation."[5] Some have guessed that the sonnets were, in part,

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[1]John Berdan, Early Tudor Poetry, 1485 - 1547 (New York, 1931), p. 456.

[2]Pearson, Op. Cit., p. 53.

[3]H. J. C. Grierson and J. C. Smith, A Critical History of English Poetry (New York, 1946), p. 74.

[4]W. Moody and W. Lovett, A History of English Literature (New York, 1946), p. 68.

[5]Ibid.

inspired by Henry's second queen, Anne Boleyn. At all events, Wyatt, in his sonnets, conveys a sincere expression of feeling.

Surrey, a contemporary and friend of Wyatt, is considered to be a better student of Petrarch than Wyatt. Surrey, like Petrarch, would sing the distressing pain of love--of the lady hiding her face from the amorous glances of her lover and of the need for faithfulness in loving. Surrey changed the rhyme scheme of the sonnet and in so doing changed the effect of the poem as a whole. Craig notes that he wrote a fourteen-line poem made up of three quatrains and a final couplet - a b a b c d c d e f e f g g.[1] He states further that Surrey's sonnet, which became the general Petrarchan form, breaks often into three thoughts or phrases of the same thought, each within the limit of the quatrain and usually employs the couplet ending for a shift in point of view.[2]

In introducing in England the Petrarchan sonnet, Wyatt and Surrey gave to Sidney, Spenser, Daniel, Shakespeare and others an accepted stanza for love poems of a reflective nature.[3] It is necessary to know in assessing anti-Petrarchism, then, something of the strong hold which Petrarchism had on English poetry from the days of its arrival upon the English scene to the days it began to disappear.

After the Petrarchan sonnet was introduced into the English literary world, a multitude of writers began to employ facets of it in their verse. Either the form or the subject matter or both were imitated outright, or

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[1]Craig, Op. Cit., p. 118.

[2]Ibid.

[3]G. Woods, H. Wyatt, G. Anderson (eds.), The Literature of England (New York, 1947), I, p. 289.

the poet used the Petrarchan pattern to convey and enhance his own imaginative offering. As Legouis puts it in speaking of the sonnet, "all poets from the time of Petrarch shared an idealism which was their philosophy. Not to say that they were imitators but they lived in a common atmosphere."[1] It might be well to note here that the followers of Petrarch, of course, made certain alterations and expansions. Craig observes that "in their hands there was an infusion of classical mythology from Ovid and Catullus, pastoralism from the Sicilian idyllists, and in some instances a trace of sensuality.[2] He further observes that "still the Petrarchan doctrine of the ethereal nature of beauty manifesting itself in the actual world is strong even in the latest sonneteers...."[3] Thus, during the age of Elizabeth when, as Coffin and Witherspoon observe, "poetry was a garden of tended and thickly grown flowers, overpowering in their fragrances."[4] The Petrarchan sonnet provided a model for the great sonneteers as well as some lesser poets. Vestiges of such can definitely be seen in the writing of Sidney, Spenser, Daniel, Constable and even Shakespeare. With Shakespeare, however, Petrarchism began to wane.

During the age of Elizabeth, Petrarchan sonneteering was in full force.[5] Poets wrote eulogies of woman's beauty and virtue in a way never

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[1] E. Legouis and L. Cezamian, A History of English Literature (New York, 1927), p. 320.

[2] Craig, Op. Cit., p. 118.

[3] Ibid.

[4] R. Coffin and A. Witherspoon, Seventeen Century Prose and Poetry (New York, 1957), p. 1.

[5] Grierson and Smith, Op. Cit., p. 106.

known before. Just as Petrarch had his Laura, Philip Sidney had his Stella who was married as Laura had been and whom Sidney praised by echoing something of what Petrarch had uttered long ago. Sidney's Stella was Penelope Devereux to whom Sidney had been betrothed when Penelope was a child. For some reason, the match was broken off and Lady Penelope married Lord Rich. It remains a question as to whether Sidney actually loved her when it was too late or whether he wrote love sonnets as a literary exercise. Moody and Lovett note that "on the one hand there is in his sonnets much of the conventional material of the Italian sonneteer; but on the other there are touches so apt to the situation of a man who loves too late, that one hesitates to ascribe them to mere dramatic skill."[1] Nevertheless, Pearson comments that "Sidney was born with a philosophy of love; it was as if the mantle of Petrarch had fallen upon the shoulders of the young Englishman."[2] Like the eyes of Petrarch's Laura, the eyes of Sidney's Stella shine with the warmth of the sun, but she is as cold as she is fair. Like Petrarch, Sidney showed woman chaste but tender and human in rejecting the lover's plea. Philip Sidney is considered to have been a poet of considerable range. About one-third of his poetry consists of a famed sonnet cycle, which includes one hundred and eight sonnets and eleven songs, called Astrophel and Stella which stand as a good example of the Petrarchan convention to which they conform. In this sequence, Stella, the unattainable, came to symbolize virtue and by the last sonnet, Sidney

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[1] Moody and Lovett, Op. Cit., p. 76.

[2] Pearson, Op. Cit., p. 84.

has arrived step by step to a clearer knowledge of spiritual love, somewhat reminiscent of Platonism. Such an ideal repeats what Petrarch made explicitly clear - that man-woman passions whenever necessary can be sublimated and idealized.

Edmund Spenser stands as another among the notable writers of sonnets during this time. His Amoretti represents his contribution to the Petrarchan tradition which is a sonnet sequence tracing his love and his wooing of Elizabeth. His lady, of course, was Elizabeth Boyle whom Spenser finally married. The group of eighty-nine sonnets relates the course of his wooing and subsequent marriage. Though Unger and O'Connor state that "Spenser is more strictly in the mode followed by Petrarch himself,"[1] Pearson notes that "he would not write of a pure love unattained."[2] However, Pearson agrees that Spenser went to Petrarch for inspiration."[3] In all fairness to Petrarch, however, it should carefully be noted that his pure, ideal love was not in itself unattainable but was simply made impossible by the marital status of Laura. Also, there is in Spenser a strong Platonic emphasis.

Samuel Daniel's Delia and Henry Constable's Diana are other examples of the extreme popularity of the sonnet in Elizabethan poetry. Legouis and Cazamian feel that "Samuel Daniel may be taken to typify the men who wrote sonnets in the fashion of Petrarch, without conviction and probably without a real mistress to sing."[4] They further state that "she whom

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[1] L. Unger and W. O'Connor (eds.), Poems for Study (Minnesota, 1960), p. 62.

[2] Pearson, Op. Cit., p. 136.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Legouis and Cazamian, Op. Cit., p. 318.

Daniel implores remains invisible, inaccessible, cold, unknown and absent."[1] Nevertheless, Daniel wrote twenty-seven sonnets to Delia in which certain traces of Petrarchism are evident. Then, Constable's sonnets are distinguished mainly by the inclusion of some very fine religious sonnets.

The one hundred and fifty-four sonnets in the cycle of William Shakespeare present perhaps the greatest sonnets of the age. The first one hundred and twenty-six seem to be addressed to a young nobleman and the final group seem to be addressed or refer to a certain "dark lady." Who the man or the woman was has not been verified in spite of many conjectures. Henry Wriothesly, third earl of Southhampton is the first favorite identification of the person addressed in the first series.[2] As to the idea that the sonnets present a story and reflect an actual experience, Unger and O'Connor observe that only this much is clear - "Shakespeare [seemingly] was betrayed by both the friend and the lady when they entered into a relationship with each other."[3] Shakespeare, in writing his sonnet sequence, was following a fashion of the numerous other Petrarchan poets before him. For, no less than the other sonneteers, he made use of the Petrarchan conventions.[4] Some of these are: the faithful but unrequited lover praises the beloved's beauty in exaggerated terms, the lover's suffering is described as an ambiguous freezing and burning; flowers, the sun, and the stars are all used for comparisons in describing the lady's

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Hardin Craig (ed.), An Introduction to Shakespeare (New York, 1952), p. 721.

[3] Unger and O'Connor, Op. Cit., p. 83.

[4] Ibid., p. 82.

beauty; the lover claims that his verse will immortalize the lady's fame and beauty.

Although Shakespeare's sonnets by and large flow in the Petrarchan vein, they at sometime show a striking change. Crutwell writes in The Shakespearean Moment that

> ...There was a change and a crisis which affected English intellectual life at the end of the Sixteenth Century. There was a shift from simplicity to complexity, from idealism to cynicism which affected Shakespeare and other fin-de-siecle authors of Elizabethan England.[1]

Grierson notes that "something had come over this idealistic and courtly love poetry by the end of the sixteenth century. It had become a literary artifice... losing itself at times in the fantastic and the absurd."[2] It is no small wonder then that by the end of the sixteenth century the English mind began to protest the artifical and ridiculous praising of woman's virtue and charm in the sonnets. And so it appeared to the mind of Shakespeare. In his CXXIXth sonnet which follows, Shakespeare obviously deviates from the Petrarchan convention.

> Th' expense of spirit in a waste of shame
> Is lust in action; and till action, lust
> Is perjur'd, murd'rous, bloody, full of blame,
> Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust;
> Enjoyed no sooner but despised straight,
> Past reason hunted, and no sooner had,
> Past reason hated, as a swallowed bait
> On purpose laid to make the taker mad;
> Mad in pursuit, and in possession so,
> Had, having, and in quest to have, extreme;

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[1] Patrick Crutwell, The Shakespearean Moment (New York, 1955), p. 56.

[2] H. J. C. Grierson (ed.), Donne's Poetical Works (New York, n.d.), p. XXVII.

A bliss in proof - and prov'd, a very woe;
Before, a joy propos'd; behind a dream.
All this the world well knows; yet none knows well
To shun the heaven that leads men to this hell.[1]

Here Shakespeare seemingly strips love of all its beauty and reduces it to lust. Grierson and Smith observe that the same change that was noted in the passing from the Elizabethan Petrarchists to the Songs and Sonets are noted in Shakespeare's writing.[2] Even though some of Shakespeare's sonnets indicate the beginning of the fall of Petrarchism, the sonnets for the most part "do veritably belong to the Petrarchan tradition,"[3] employing both its language and its situation. And although the sonnets are in the Petrarchan tradition, "they are nevertheless sincere personal utterances of Shakespeare and embody not only the results of his constructive imagination but the feelings of his heart."[4]

All in all, the sonnet continued in English literature for the most part, as Petrarch wrote it. His followers, of course, made some alterations and expansions. The sonnets were mainly in cycle form. They concerned themselves with the great ethereal quality of the beauty of the beloved, her cruelty or sweetness, the pains of separation from her, and the sympathetic aspects of the moon and other objects. In short, they glorified womanhood. Such was the birth, something of the life, and the beginning of the decline of Petrarchism.

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[1] William Shakespeare, Sonnet CXXIX.

[2] Grierson and Smith, Op. Cit., p. 137.

[3] Craig, Op. Cit., p. 122.

[4] Ibid.

CHAPTER II

INFLUENCES ON THE TIMES AND LIFE OF JOHN DONNE

As demonstrated in Chapter I, English lyrical and love poetry remained almost continuously Petrarchan from the time of Wyatt and Surrey and the introduction of the sonnet into English poetry during the reign of Henry VIII until the time of John Donne. Donne was the first of these metaphysical poets - George Herbert, Henry Vaughn, and Richard Crashaw - whose poetry was marked by highly complex and greatly compressed meanings, by long sustained conceits, by a frequent avoidance of smooth and regular meter, and by a skillful blending of the physical and spiritual. As will be demonstrated, not only did Donne initiate the mode for the metaphysical style, but he also effectively challenged the Petrarchan tradition in English poetry. It is not therefore wholly accurate to say that this poet was primarily a seventeenth century metaphysical poet. Donne is important as the first major poet who revolted against the literary conventions of the Petrarchan tradition by formulating a new style of poetry in England and by depicting human emotions with such realism that his poems have transcended time and achieved lasting appeal.

When Donne entered the literary scene during the last decade of the sixteenth century, Petrarchism was in high literary vogue. Shakespeare had perhaps set the stage for Donne's rebellion, but the age, accustomed to the smoothly flowing sonnet of the Elizabethans with their idealization of woman, was utterly shocked by the harshness of Donne's language and the ruggedness of his verse. Gosse points out that Donne's "were the first poems which protested in their form alike and their tendency, against the

sweetness of the Elizabethan verse."[1] What incited Donne to reject the conventional pattern of love poetry has been discussed by many scholars. Some contend that Donne was indebted to the times in which he lived; others hold that personal factors in the life of the poet caused him to turn out "upon the world the sharp shards"[2] found in his love poetry. Final answer must wait upon an examination of the times and life of John Donne.

In the history of England, the period between 1600 and 1660 was a time both of vast destruction and brilliant creation. Indeed, scholasticism was slowly being complemented by humanism; absolutism bowed to Pariamentarianism while Puritanism and Catholicism[3] vied to hold their own. The age was one of questioning and uncertainty, change and upheaval. This age of turmoil and ferment was not without a philosophic core. In the centuries before, the world had largely been a place in which to prepare for a life beyond; the noblest subject had been theology, and the saving of his soul had been man's most important task. With the 17th century, men came to realize in some measure that the earthly life had importance in itself. This shifting of view about life on earth and life after death was a product of the Renaissance and is therefore of great significance in the history of man and civilization. According to Kuhn, the "Renaissance"

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[1] Edmond Gosse, The Jacobean Poets (London, 1914), p. 47.

[2] R. Coffin and A. Witherspoon, Op. Cit., p. 9.

[3] Even though England officially renounced Catholicism in the early 16th century, there was still a struggle between Lutheran, Calvinist and Roman Catholic factions. William Long, English Literature (New York, 1937), p. 188.

refers to the

> whole process of the transition from the mediaeval to the modern world. It thus includes not merely intellectual rebirth due to the new study of ancient classics, but those equally mighty forces which arose at the same time such as the decay of the Holy Roman Empire, the disappearance of the feudal system, and the rise of free cities, the great upheaval of the Reformation, the discovery of the New World and the invention of printing.[1]

Thus, during the seventeenth century in England the spirit of the Renaissance reached its fullest development. There was an intellectual revolt against scholasticism and a renewed emphasis on humanism. Thomas Henry Huxley has defined this change as "the transition from the belief that blind faith is a virtue and skepticism a sin to the conviction that unquestioned authority is a sin and healthy skepticism a virtue."[2] Thus, Aristotle's deductive method of reasoning was gradually replaced or complement by Bacon's inductive method. Man began to seek for truth in nature and man, and not just in the writings of those to whom truth had been divinely revealed. Then, too, certain literary scholars devoted themselves to the study and teaching of such classic authors as Ovid, Seneca, Virgil and Horace. Often this emphasis on the classics constituted part of the humanistic search for truth and reality.

In the area of science, Copernicus, the renowned polish astronomer, had in 1543 made his famous revelation that the universe was heliocentric and not geocentric. Before Copernicus the Ptolemaic theory had held that the universe was a vast system of concentric spheres with the earth at

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[1] Kuhns, Op. Cit., p. 120.

[2] Thomas Henry Huxley quoted in Woods, Watts and Anderson, Op. Cit., p. 284.

the center. Ford relates that "the spheres carried the moon, the sun, the planets, and the stars; the substance of these celestial bodies increased in refinement and purity in porportion to their distance from the earth, and beyond the outer sphere lay empyrean heaven, the abode of God."[1] The cosmos was thought to have been bound together in a divinely appointed order. This order was centered on a chain of being in which all animate and inanimate matter was arranged in an ascending order up to God. Man was considered to have formed the central link-with the animals, vegetables and inanimate matter below him, and with God and the angels above him. Thus, science and religion were linked until Copernicus came along with his revolutionary theory showing that man's abode was not the center of the universe but merely another planet circling the sun. This revelation disconcerted many rational men because, to some, this new truth meant that man was not as important to God as man had once supposed. As Bush puts it, "disillusionment flourished with science and science had to be defended as not an attack on religion."[2]

Even as man's mind was in a state of disorder concerning the Copernican theory, Galileo invented the telescope. This invention made it possible to provide new evidence to confirm the Copernican hypothesis. In addition, Galileo's discovery of the milky way galaxy of stars further jolted those who believed man to be the center of the universe. Thus, in the early seventeenth century Galileo's observation succeeded in further

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[1]Boris Ford (ed.), From Donne to Marvell (New York, 1960), p. 44.

[2]Douglas Bush, Science in English Poetry (New York, 1950), p. 41.

undermining the idea of the Ptolemaic cosmos. In other words, Galileo's telescope brought man closer to the truth and shattered many of his misconceptions about the nature of the universe.

Francis Bacon, one of Donne's contemporaries, was one of the seekers of the truth in the seventeenth century. An excellent intellectual, a brilliant philosopher, and the creator of the English essay, Bacon, though not a scientist himself, devoted himself to the development of a new approach to scientific methods. As Willey puts it, "Bacon was in truth the seer, almost the poet, of the scientific movement in England."[1] Perhaps Bacon did not invent the inductive reasoning principle of scientific inquiry but he gave it established modern expression which has been followed ever since. The medieval scientist had worked from an hypothesis or a general principle and deduced facts to give logical support to this hypothesis or principle. However, Bacon's inductive method of reasoning worked from the observation of specific facts to the formation of general principles. This is the method of scientific research today. Bacon, said to be concerned with the methods of acquiring truth from the outset of his career, stands as a fine illustration of man in his quest for knowledge and truth during the seventeenth century. In his Advancement of Learning he explained his wish to review all of the science of his own time, describe all the methods for acquiring truth and devise a system for classifying the various branches of knowledge. Similarly, his Novum Organum championed the inductive method of reasoning. Famous here is his description of the

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[1] Basil Willey, The Seventeenth Century Background (New York, 1952), p. 44.

"idols" his word for bad habits of thinking that caused men to err and prevent them from seeing the truth. As Legouis puts it, Bacon had drawn up the programme of the general effort by which modern thought was to explore and get acquainted with truth.[1] He further states that Bacon accepted the Renaissance idea that it is life on earth which is important and that all studies should be directed to works improving that life.[2]

Another feature of the times was the political struggle between individualism and anti-authoritarianism. Anti-authoritarianism primarily manifested itself in the revolt of Parliament against the king. This revolt came to life during the reign of the Stuarts following the reign of Queen Elizabeth. Queen Elizabeth had become Queen of England in 1558. Not only had England then been divided by religious feuds but had been treated as an appanage of Spain.[3] However, during Elizabeth's reign, internal order and individual security were maintained. A new Church, under the denomination of the state, was firmly established, the colonial system was inaugurated and England became supreme on the high seas. After 1588 and the defeat of the Spanish Armada, England was no longer threatened by Spain. England, during Elizabeth's reign came to a period of national unity and spirit and to a period of internal well being. Then upon the death of Queen Elizabeth in 1603, James the Sixth of Scotland came to the throne as James the First of England. Believing in the divine right of kings, he felt that the king was responsible only to God and that only a

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[1] Legouis, Op. Cit., p. 694.

[2] Ibid.

[3] G. M. Trevelyan, History of England (New York, 1952), p. 154.

king therefore could interpret divine will. Similarly, his son and successor Charles the First could not get along with Parliament because of the same divine rights of kings idea. Both Charles and his father considered Parliament as merely an advisory board, to which they had no real obligation. Moreover, both soverigns dissolved Parliament during their reigns.[1] This struggle between the king and Parliament resulted in the civil war of the 1640's, the eventual decapitation of Charles and the establishment of the Puritan commonwealth.

The conflict between absolutism and Parliamentarianism is related to the religious strife of the age. The divine rights concept incensed both Parliament and Puritans and solidified all the monarchial opposition. At the Hampton court conference in 1604, the Puritans or non-conformers asked for "legalized comprehension" within the Established Church.[2] They also asked for an end to episcopacy and for the right to take communion in a sitting position. Regarding the importance of the Hampton court conference, Trevelyan observes:

> It was a moment when a settlement might well have been made on the basis of comprehension, by a little widening of the borders of a State Church designed to be elastic, more especially since toleration outside the Church was not then regarded as permissible. To deny any legalized activity, either within or without the Establishment, to the movement which then had most influence on the laity and particularly on Parliament was to sow the seeds of civil war.[3]

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[1] James dissolved Parliament in 1621 and imprisoned all its members. Charles dismissed Parliament in 1629, recalled it in 1640 and dissolved it again after a short section (April 13-May 5, 1640). Trevelyan, Op. Cit., p. 178. See also Carl Friedrich and Charles Blitzer, The Age of Power (New York, 1957), p. 123.

[2] Trevelyan, Op. Cit., p. 157.

[3] Ibid.

James denied all requests. Not only did he pronounce his famous dictum "No Bishop, no King," but he also added "I will make them conform or I will harry them [the Puritans] out of the land." Thus began the religious conflict that eventually ended in a civil war and transferred the soverign power from king to Parliament.

Actually the religious problems that confronted James had a long background and began with England's official separation from the Church at Rome in 1534 when Parliament enacted the Act of Supremacy to establish Henry VIII as the head of the Church of England. Inevitably the idea of a national church in England presented a critical problem. All of the newly formed Protestant sects were striving either to save their particular denominations or to have their particular faiths declared the Church of England. The Church of England was actually a blend of Lutheran, Calvinist, and Roman Catholic elements. It was characterized by a strictly hierarchical, episcopal organization much like that of the Church of Rome, except for the fact that its head was not the pope but the king. Thus Church and monarchy were interdependent institutions. However, both the Puritans and the Catholics questioned the religious supremacy of the king; and so intense was the Puritans' grievance that many migrated to New England. Those who remained in England were determined to see the conflict through to its bitter end. Thus, the story of the Puritan's struggle for individual liberty against the absolutist methods of the early Stuart kings amounts at the same time to the story of the constitutionalizing of England's Parliament and the beginning of the colonization of some sections of America. Years of bitter struggle passed before the impossibility of uniting the various Protestant sects was generally recognized. The ideal of a national church died hard and to its death was due much of the religious unrest.

In such a world of scientific, political and religious upheaval John Donne was born in the city of London in 1572.[1] His father, also John Donne, was a tradesman who became in 1574 Warden of the Company of Ironmongers. Donne's mother, Elizabeth was a daughter of the dramatist John Heywood and was also descended from the saint and martyr Sir Thomas More. Thus her family had long held a conspicuous place among English Catholics.[2] Under Queen Elizabeth during the years in which Donne grew up Catholics were considered aliens, exposed to insult, suspicion, and suffering for their faith.[3] During this time, Catholics could not take an English university degree, and a professed allegiance to Rome was for a talented and ambitious Englishman in Elizabeth's time a drawback. Living in such an environment of religious hostility and authoritarianism, Donne was perhaps stimulated to develop the haughty spirit of originality and independence which seemingly characterized him throughout his life.

Although they were Catholic, Donne's parents sent him to Oxford early to give him at least the rudiments of a liberal education before the age of sixteen.[4] According to Walton, Donne was transplanted from Oxford to Cambridge at the age of fourteen and stayed there until his seventeenth year.[5] Leishman observes that not only would Donne as a Catholic have been

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[1]K. W. Gransden, John Donne (New York, 1954), p. 4.

[2]A royal commission had confiscated the lands of her father whose poems had so excellently diverted Queen Mary in her dejection. For Queen Mary, Heywood composed the poem "The Spider and the Fly." Ibid.

[3]In Donne's early life persecution was brought near for his brother died in prison for harboring a priest. Hugh Fausset, John Donne, A Story in Discord (New York, 1923), p. 27.

[4]Catholics could attend the university but could not take an English University degree.

[5]Izaak Walton, Lives (New York, n.d.), p. 18.

unable to take a degree but on reaching the age of sixteen he would have been compelled to take the Oath of Supremacy.[1] One may conclude therefore, that Donne's lack of a degree from either university probably resulted in his inability, as a Catholic, to take the required oaths. In 1591 Donne settled in London to study law and was admitted into the Society of Lincoln's Inn in 1592.[2] Such were the circumstances under which John Donne received his formal education.

In 1596, Donne began his travels by joining the expedition of Essex to Cadiz and to the Azores in 1597.[3] Following this period of military activity, the young poet travelled, reportedly bought a great many books, and lived the life of a gallant man-about-town, fond of women, wine, good conversation, and expensive company.

In 1597 Donne entered the service of London's Sir Thomas Egerton, who in 1596 had become Lord Keeper of the Seal of England. By this time, although Donne had not yet openly renounced the Catholic faith, he had quietly dropped it. Gransden comments that "in his heart he may have still accepted it, may perhaps have despised State Protestantism. But his brain responded to a world where you were judged not by your policy."[4] At any rate, Donne, with an outlook allegedly much less Catholic, began what has been called his period of civil service as Egerton's secretary.

While in the employment of Egerton, Donne fell in love with Egerton's young niece, Ann More, whom he later married against the wishes of her father. Upon learning of the marriage, Sir Georgie More, Ann's father,

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[1] J. B. Leishman, The Monarch of Wit (New York, 1951), p. 2.
[2] Gransden, Op. Cit., p. 6.
[3] Ibid., p. 7.
[4] Ibid., p. 12.

succeeded in having Donne discharged from his job and afterward sent to prison - along with the two accomplices - Samuel Brooke who performed the rites and Christopher Brooke who witnessed them. The Archbishop of Canterbury finally declared the marriage legal, and Donne and the Brookes were released from prison. However, unable to return to his job, Donne was, as Gransden puts it, "cast out, unemployed, upon a troubled and talent-weary world."[1]

At the beginning of his married life in 1600 Donne was lucky to be offered board and lodging at Pyrford by his wife's cousin Sir Francis Wooley.[2] Here the poet spent three years increasing his knowledge by reading voraciously. It is believed that between 1590 and 1602 Donne must have written many of the secular poems.[3] Because he published little of his verse during his lifetime, accurately dating his writings is nearly impossible.

After a considerable amount of spiritual struggle engendered by religious persecution, epicureanism, interrupted education, poverty and illness, John Donne in 1615 became an Anglican Preacher. Before becoming a preacher, however, he wrote two anti-Catholic prose tracts Pseudo-Martyr (1610) and Ignatius His Conclave (1611). Hereafter, Donne excelled as a prose writer and as a preacher of intense insight, nobly declaiming the praises of Christ the Savior and writing beautiful and fervent devotions. He remained for most of his career the Dean of St. Paul's in London, an office which he filled from 1621 until his death in 1631. As Dean, Donne achieved his great reputation as a preacher.

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[1] Gransden, Op. Cit., p. 17.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

CHAPTER III

AN ANALYSIS OF ANTI-PETRARCHISM IN SELECTED POEMS OF JOHN DONNE

The question now arises as to why Donne rejected the traditional Elizabethan convention for the expression of love in poetry? Many theories have been presented on the subject. There are some who would say that factors in Donne's personal life explain the revolt and others would contend that the times or other considerations stand as the reason for the revolt.[1] On the personal side of the ledger there seem to be grounds for believing that Donne's abandonment of Catholicism in order to secure a good job, the tragic death of his brother, and the troubled early years of his marriage may have caused him to become cynical. Pursuing this line of reasoning, some critics hold that Donne, hurt and angry, revolted from Petrarchism simply for the sake of venting his bitterness. It has also been thought that Donne's reaction against Petrarchism was due chiefly to the religious or political conditions of the age.

Many other considerations have been advanced as possible reasons for Donne's revolt against the Petrarchan tradition. Alvarez, for instance, believes that Donne was intensely intellectual in his use of a reservoir of ideas, words, and phrases and that the restricted confines of the Petrarchan pattern could not possibly serve as a suitable vehicle for Donne's thought.[2] This conjecture is plausible. Undoubtedly this factor did contribute to some degree to the anti-Petrarchan strain found in Donne's

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[1] Donne's personal life and the times were treated in the preceding chapter.

[2] A. Alvarez, The School of Donne (New York, 1961), p. 25f.

early poetry. Louis Bredvold,[1] on the other hand, attributes Donne's "revolution in love" to the naturalism of the poet. Bredvold cites Donne's familiarity with the Law of Nature and contends that Donne did not believe, like the naturalists, that nature was the source or the basis of ethics which teaches man virtue and justice. Rather, Donne seemingly refers to nature as a source of justification for amoral physical desires; thus he disregarded altogether the idea of nature as the source of a universal moral law. Bredvold suggests that Donne's revolt might be traced to his "somewhat degraded concept of nature."[2] Such a consideration might have been the case; however, the final answer should come to light after an analysis of Donne's poetry.

Whatever the cause, Donne found it impossible to express himself within the limits of Petrarchism. Consequently, he revolted against its formality and its artificiality. His love poetry is realistic; his approach is usually bitter and hard; his language belongs to him alone. In Donne's poems, the love of the mistress is not only sought but gained; and the passion of their love passes beyond a breathless, throbbing excitement of body and mind to unite itself with the great spirit of love which, as Pearson states, has brooded over man since the dawn of physical consciousness.[3] As Unger and O'Connor put it, in Donne's poems the psychology of love has the quality of real experience rather than of literary convention.[4]

That the love poems of Donne are anti-Petrarchan can be indicated by an examination of their dominant features. Specifically, the verses of

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[1]See Louis Bredvold, "The Naturalism of Donne's," Discussions of John Donne, ed. Frank Kermode (Boston, 1962), p. 49f.

[2]Ibid., p. 50.

[3]Pearson, Op. Cit., p. 244.

[4]Unger and O'Connor, Op. Cit., p. 106.

his Songs and Sonets and "Love Elegies" amply prove this point. The verses in Donne's Songs and Sonets are chiefly different from much of the love verse that was produced by Donne's contemporaries and immediate predecessors. The poems differ as love poems from those using the theme and form of the Petrarchan sonneteers. Hunt notes that "any reader of some of Donne's elegies and songs will feel that he has passed from one extreme to another... that he has immersed himself in the mud-baths of sensual passion and cynical scorn of woman."[1] The attitudes developed in the poems are obvious reversals of such Petrarchan concepts as woman's purity, lover's faithfulness and the value of chastity. Although the "Love Elegies" add up to a miscellany of secular poems which Donne saw fit to label elegies, they are, as Gosse observes, mainly studies of the progress of the passion of love.[2] Thus, in Donne's poems one notes an unconventional concept of women, an unorthodox and unromantic attitude towards love, and an unconventional treatment of love.

Donne's concept of womanhood is almost consistently uncomplimentary and his statements about womankind are particularly unflattering. It is believed that after the flood of conventional sonnet sequences glorifying the woman, Donne felt the need for realism. Thus, instead of praising woman's beauty or her virtue, he merely makes terse uncomplimentary statements about womanhood in such poems as "Goe and Catche a Falling Starre," "Woman's Constancy," "The Relique," "The Primrose," and "Love's Alchymie."

For instance, in the poem "Goe and Catche a Falling Starre," the poet insists that there are no fair women who are also true. Consequently,

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[1] Clay Hunt, Donne's Poetry (Connecticut, 1954), p. 144.

[2] E. Gosse, The Jacobean Poets (London, 1899), p. 55.

the speaker states that though it might be possible for someone to "goe and catche a falling starre"[1] or for someone to "tell him where all past years are"[2] or for someone to teach him to hear the singing of mermaids or never to envy anyone; yet, no one could ever direct him to a woman who is both faithful and fair. The speaker ends on the pessimistic note saying

> If thou findst one, let mee know,
> Such a Pilgrimage were sweet;
> Yet doe not, I would not goe,
> Though at next doore wee might meet,
> Though she were true when you met her,
> And last, till you write your letter,
> Yet shee
> Will bee
> False, ere I come, to two, or three.[3]

Here, Donne definitely defies the Petrarchan manner of presenting woman in a glorious way. The poet states in no uncertain terms that no woman both true and fair, exists anywhere in the world. The same theme prevails in the poem "Woman's Constancy." The title displays Donne's ironic wit; for, the theme of the poem is really woman's inconstancy. Here, as Gransden notes, can be found an expressed awareness of the fact that both time and truth are relative concepts; one's lady may be true now, but in a moment she will be false[4] and

> ...say that now
> We are not just those persons, which we were.[5]

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[1]John Donne, "Goe and Catche a Falling Starre," l. 1, The Complete Poetry and Selected Prose of John Donne. eds. Charles Coffin and James Dempsey (New York, 1952), p. 9. All subsequent references to Donne's Poems, unless otherwise stated, are made to this edition and are entered without the name of the author. The spelling in the poems is the author's.

[2]"Goe and Catche a Falling Starre," l. 3.

[3]Ibid. ll. 19-27.

[4]Gransden, Op. Cit., p. 74.

[5]"Woman's Constancy," ll. 4-5.

After a discussion of feminine fickleness, the poet frankly admits to equal fickleness on the part of the male speaker. This stress on inconstancy between lovers is just the opposite of that of the Petrarchan tradition. In that tradition neither women nor men were portrayed as being fickle but always as being wise and courteous.

Woman's inconstancy seemingly is a favorite theme of John Donne. In the first stanza of "The Relique," Donne alludes to woman's inconstancy when he writes.

> (For graves have learn'd that woman-head
> To be to more than one a bed)[1]

Here, Gransden notes, the meaning is "that graves have learned the feminine trick of being a bed to more than one person: old graves were often dug up to make room for new tenants."[2] Donne introduces his thought here with startling boldness. Similarly, in "Twicknam Garden," a forsaken lover speaks to lovers who have not yet experienced desolation. In this poem it is a woman's inconstancy which causes the speaker's torment. One of the demands of Petrarchism was, of course, constancy in love and as a result women remained constant in all love poetry written in the Petrarchan tradition. Donne, however, presents woman in a different light. He views woman as being false, fickle, and inconstant. At one time he wrote that "there must reside/falsehood in woman."[3] At another, he stated "hope not for minde in women; at their best/sweetnesse and wit, they are but mummy possest."[4]

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[1] "The Relique," ll. 3-4.

[2] Gransden, Op. Cit., p. 58.

[3] "The Primrose," ll. 18-19.

[4] "The Alchymie," ll. 23-24.

Just as Donne stressed inconstancy in love, he also wrote poems stressing woman's lack of virtue. His "Jealosie" may be analyzed as an example. The speaker says to his lady: your husband is jealous of us, so we should be thankful and kind to the poor man for warning us to be careful. Thus, we must not "usurpe his owne bed any more/nor kisse and play in his house, as before"[1]--but select another house for our affair. Thus, the poem tells of a woman who cuckolds her husband in his own house. Similarly, in "Elegie II, 'Anagram,'" Donne reverses the Petrarchan convention of presenting woman as fair and beautiful. Instead of the usual delicate description of woman's beauty, he writes

> Marry, and love thy Flavia, for shee
> Hath all things, whereby others beautious bee,
> For though her eyes be small, her mouth is great,
> Though they be ivory, yet her teeth be jeat,
> Though they be dimme, yet she is light enough,
> And though her harsh haire fall, her skin is rough;
> What though her cheeks be yellow, her haire's red,[2]

The poem concludes by presenting the idea that beautiful women are unfaithful and as for ugly women, he claims that they are faithful only because the "durty foulnesse"[3] of their faces guards them from infidelity. Like "The Anagram," another elegy, "The Comparison," inverses the conventional praise of women found in the Petrarchan tradition. This "Elegie VII"[4] has been called one of the most notorious of the elegies. Here the speaker compares the "sweat drops" of his mistress' breast with pearl coronots. He states that her head is "like a rough-hewne statue of jeat,/where marks

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[1] "Elegie I,'Jealosie,'" ll. 23-24.

[2] "Elegie II, 'The Anagram,'" ll. 1-7.

[3] Ibid., l. 42.

[4] "Elegie VII, 'The Comparison,'" l. 4.

for eyes, nose, mouth, are yet scarce set."[1] He speaks of her "swolne fingers of her gouty hand."[2] Of her kisses he asks

> Are not your kisses then as filthy, and more,
> As a worme sucking an invenom'd sore?[3]

The speaker ends by stating

> Leave her, and I will leave comparing thus,
> She, and comparisons are odious.[4]

Thus Donne rejects the cult of lofty womanhood and presents woman as perhaps she actually appeared to him - not always constant, faithful, virtuous nor beautiful.[5]

According to Unger, another outstanding characteristic of Donne's love poems is the presentation of a speaker who expresses an unorthodox and unromantic attitude toward love.[6] In some of the poems, the speaker is indiscriminate and promiscuous and says that all men and women should be so. This praise of variety in love is definitely anti-Petrarchan in that it disregards the Petrarchan theory that romantic love must be limited to one object and that one forever. Apparently, Donne advocates "free love" in diametric opposition to the stated moral standards of the love poetry of the Elizabethan age. As Bredvold puts it, Donne stresses the

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[1] Ibid., ll. 19-20.

[2] Ibid., ll. 34.

[3] Ibid., ll. 43-44.

[4] Ibid., ll. 53-54.

[5] Although Donne's view of woman never seemed to have actually changed in his verse, he did, however, seem to find that certain women were superior beings. According to Price, this modification of his general conception of womanhood parallels his transition and moral purification from "Jack Donne," Elizabethan libertine to Dr. Donne, Dean of St. Paul's. A. Price, "John Donne's Idea of Women," Unpublished Masters Thesis (New York, 1957), p. 2.

[6] Leonard Unger, Donne's Poetry and Modern Criticism (New York, 1962), p. 39.

condition of liberty, of change--the natural freedom of lovers.[1] Such an attitude is evident in "The Indifferent," "Confined Love," "Communitic," "The Primrose," "Change" and "Variety."

The theme of "The Indifferent" celebrates variety in love and the attitude of the speaker remains the same throughout. Donne states that he can love

> ...both faire and browne,
> Her whom abundance melts, and her whom want betraies;
> Her who loves lonenesse best and her who markes and plaies,
> Her whom the country form'd, and whom the town,
> Her who believes, and her who tries,
> Her who still weepes with spungie eyes,
> And her who is dry corke, and never cries;
> I can love her, and her, and you and you.[2]

Here the speaker stresses freedom in love and states that he can love the "faire and browne," the rich and poor, the introvert and the extrovert. In essence, he states that he delights in variety in love. Similar conclusions may be drawn from "Confined Love." The idea emphasized here is that a woman should not be bound in love to only one man. This thought is implied in the lines "who e'r rigg'd faire ship to lie in harbors,/ and not to seeke new lands and deale with all?;"[3] and, it is expressly stated at the end of the poem:

> Good is not good, unlesse
> A thousand it possesse,
> But doth wast with greedinesse.[4]

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[1] Bredvold, Op. Cit., p. 49.

[2] "The Indifferent," ll. 1-8.

[3] "Confined Love," ll. 15-16.

[4] Ibid., ll. 18-20.

This line of thought continues in "Communitic" where the speaker seems to present the idea of the utility of women as over against the loving qualities of women. He says

> If then at first wise nature had
> Made women either good or bad,
> Then some we might hate, and some chuse,
> But since shee did them so create,
> That we may neither love, nor hate,
> Only this rests, all, all may use.[1]

The speaker continues by stating that

> ...they (women) are ours as fruits are ours,[2]

> Chang'd loves are but chang'd sorts of meat,
> And when hee hath the kernell eate,
> Who doth not fling away the shell?[3]

Here seemingly the idea is presented that once a man has loved a woman, he should discard her as one does a shell after finishing a nut and that he should then choose another to love in the same manner. Such a concept is definitely anti-Petrarchan. The final stanza of "The Primrose" follows the same trend of thought. The poet states

> Live, Primrose then, and thrive
> With thy true member five;
> And women, whom this flower doth represent,
> With this mysterious number; if halfe ten
> Belonge unto each woman, then
> Each woman may take halfe us men;
> Or if this will not serve their turne, since all
> Numbers are odde, or even, and they fall
> First unto this, five, women may take us all.[4]

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[1] "Communitic," ll. 7-12.

[2] Ibid., l. 19.

[3] Ibid., ll. 22-24.

[4] "The Primrose," ll. 21-30.

The poet seemingly suggests here that women should feel unrestrained and free to love all men. A similar thought is presented in the elegy "Change." The speaker argues that

> Women are like the arts, forc'd unto none,
> Open to all searchers, unpriz'd if unknowne.
> If I have caught a bird, and let him flie,
> Another fouler using these meanes, as I,
> May catch the same bird; and, as these things bee,
> Women are made for men, not him, nor mee.
> Foxes and goats; all beasts change when they please,
> Shall women, more hot, wily, wild than these,
> Be bound to one man....?[1]

Continuing his argument, the speaker states

> Though Danuby into the sea must flow,
> The sea receives the Rhene, Volga, and Po.[2]

Here he seems to compare a woman to the sea which receives not just one river but all of them in due course; therefore, he considers it proper for a woman to love more than one man. The same idea is set forth in such lines as "To live in one land is captivitie,"[3] and "Waters stincke soone, if one place they bide."[4] The poet concludes his argument by stating that the rivers

> ...kisse one banke, and leaving this
> Never looke backe, but the next banke doe kisse,
> Then they are purest; change is the nursery
> Of musicke, joy, life and eternity.[5]

Similarly, "Variety" is another example of the poet's idea of "free love." Here the speaker states that pleasure is not pleasure if it is not

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[1] "Elegy III, 'Change,'" ll. 5-13.

[2] Ibid., ll. 19-20.

[3] Ibid., l. 29.

[4] Ibid., l. 31.

[5] Ibid., ll. 32-35.

"diversifi'd" and that all things delight in change. Speaking of women, he states

> Let no man tell me such a one is faire,
> And worthy all alone my love to share.
> Nature in her hath done the liberall part
> Of a kinde mistresse, and imploy'd her art
> To make her loveable, and I aver
> Him not humane that would turn back from her:
> I love her well, and would if need were, dye
> To doe her service, but follows it that I
> Must serve her onely, when I may have choice
> Of other beauties, and in change rejoice?[1]

The speaker continues by stating that he can love "faire" women, "brown" women and all "others," whether they be fair or brown or not. He then speaks happily of the "ancient time" when "plurality of loves" was not considered a crime--when even "kindreds were not exempted from the bands,"[2] and "women were no sooner asked than won."[3] Now, in Elizabethan times man is made a servant to opinion and society has prescribed manners and laws for him to follow. The poem concludes with the poet upholding variety in love.

As can be seen, Donne reacted violently against the conventions of the Petrarchan tradition in his concept of women as well as his unconventional attitude toward love. It is thought that the sensuality in so much of his poetry was a reaction against courtly idealism. But Donne did not merely react against conventional poetry; he also seems to salute love as a physical passion or sex experience. The end of such love brings mutual joy and happiness. Whereas the Petrarchist had sung of unrequited love in

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[1] "Elegy XVII, 'Variety,'" ll. 15-24.

[2] Ibid., l. 42.

[3] Ibid., l. 44.

spiritual terms, Donne, in what is considered to be his later love poetry, writes of requited love in physical terms. For unlike the Petrarchists who celebrated the spirituality of an unapproachable, unattainable lady, Donne celebrates the joy of mutual and contented passion and emphasizes the interdependence of body and soul. Note the strong physical emphasis in the following lines:

> I wonder by my troth what thou and I
> Did 'till we loved.[1]
>
> For Godsake hold your tongue and let me love.[2]
>
> If yet I have not all thy love,
> Deare, I shall never have it all.[3]

Thus, in his most serious love poetry, Donne argues that love is a relationship between two persons loving each other with mutual physical fire and passion. According to Gardner, "the poems written by Donne in which "'thou' and 'I' are merged into 'we' are his most original and profound contribution to human love poetry."[4] Moreover, Empsom notes that the thoughts of Donne about love were already real in the Stone Age and that Donne merely realistically reveals them.[5] In other words, Donne merely records in his poetry ancient truth about the relation of men and women. In effect, he presents an anatomy of love and shows that it is not only a fusion of the spiritual and the physical but incomplete if it lacks

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[1] "The Good Morrow," ll. 1-2.

[2] "The Canonization," l. 1.

[3] "Lover's Infinitenesse," ll. 1-2.

[4] Helen Gardner (ed.), The Metaphysical Poets (London, 1961), p. XXX.

[5] W. Empsom, "Donne the Space Man," KR, XIX (1957), p. 384.

either element. His poems "The Good Morrow," "The Sunne Rising," "The Flea," "The Ecstasy," and "The Anniversarie" express his views about this kind of love.

In much of Donne's poetry, mutual love is presented as a fusion of two separate souls into a single soul. Such is true of "The Good Morrow." The opening lines of the poem indicate that it is addressed by a lover to his loved one after a night of love. The lover states that he wonders what they both did "'til" they loved. He answers by stating that previous to this love, they were infants or asleep in the legendary den of the seven sleepers. In the closing line of the first stanza, the poet turns from the pre-love condition to the present: except for his love, he says all pleasures were fancies and all his former experience of beauty was but a dream of the loved one. The poet writes

> If ever any beauty I did see,
> Which I desired and got; twas but a dream of thee.[1]

In the second stanza, the lovers are similarly presented as being in one little world of their own. Then, in the third stanza, the poet states

> My face in thine eye, thine in mine appears,
> And true plain hearts do in the faces rest;
> Where can we find two better hemispheres
> Without sharp north, without declining west?
> Whatever dies was not mixed equally;
> If our two loves be one, or thou and I
> Love so alike that none do slacken, none can die.[2]

This stanza begins as the lovers are presented finding their respective worlds in each other's eyes. The two lovers are happily in love; and,

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[1] "The Good Morrow," ll. 6-7.

[2] "The Good Morrow," ll. 6-7.

as Baugh puts it, "love is the be-all and the end-all of their existence."[1] "The Sunne Rising," too, is an utterance of a lover after a night of love. Here, as in "The Good Morrow," the love feeling is mutual between the lovers. The whole poem is addressed to the sun. In questioning and commanding the sun, the speaker, in effect, chides the sun for rising and interrupting a night of love

> Busie old foole, unruly sunne,
> Why dost thou thus
> Through windows and through curtains call on us?
> Must to thy motions lovers seasons run.[2]

The lover states that their love is indifferent to all the influences that the sun has upon the world. And, throughout the poem the lovers are in themselves as complete as the world.

In "The Flea" the idea of the physical conjunction of two lovers is explored with a little different emphasis. Here Donne insists that there is no difference between the sex art and being bitten by the same flea; in either case, the speaker argues to the woman, "our two bloods mingled be."[3] The speaker continues by stating that

> This flea is you and I, and this
> Our mariage bed, and mariage temple is;[4]

Following these lines,the idea is presented that should the woman kill the flea she will have committed three sins - of killing the lover, the loved one, and the flea.

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[1] Albert Baugh, A Literary History of England (New York, 1948), p. 633.

[2] "The Sunne Rising," ll. 1-4.

[3] "The Flea," l. 4.

[4] Ibid., ll. 12-13.

"The Ecstasy," on the other hand, describes the steps by which a man and woman arrive at the consummation of a sexual experience that blends physical love and spiritual love and renders them interdependent and inseparable. He speaks

> Where, like a pillow on a bed,
> A pregnant banke swel'd up, to rest
> The violets reclining head,
> Sat we two, one another's best
> Our hands were firmely cimented
> With a fast balme, which thence did spring,
> Our eye-beames twisted, and did thred
> Our eyes upon one double string;[1]
>
> Our soules (which to advance their state,[2]
> Were gone out) hung twixt her, and mee.
>
> To our bodies turn we then, that so
> Weake men on love revealed may looke;
> Loves mysteries in soules doe grow,
> But yet the body is his booke.
> And if some lover, such as wee,
> Have heart this dialogue of one,
> Let him still marke us, he shall see
> Small change, when we are to bodies gone.[3]

Here, using an extended metaphysical image, Donne declares that although the origin of all love is spiritual, the physical experience is the conclusive expression of this basic spiritual love. Thus while Petrarch seemed to view the spiritual and physical aspects of love as separate entities, Donne's metaphysical orientation compels him to declare them inseparable. This metaphysical idea of love is also found in "The Anniversary." In this poem the body disappears from sight in the spirit-

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[1] "The Ecstasy," ll. 1-8.

[2] Ibid., ll. 15-16.

[3] Ibid., ll. 69-76.

ual passion which it (the body) kindles, and this valid and complete physical relationship between man and woman fuses their souls into a lovers' world that

> ...hath no decay
> This, no tomorrow hath, nor yesterday,
> Running it never runs from us away,
> But truly keepes his first, last everlasting day.[1]

As the foregoing analyses indicate, there are many anti-Petrarchan themes in Donne's poetry. The significant elements in the Donnesque poems analyzed seem to be these: (1) women are not always worthy of glorification, (2) lovers are often unfaithful and (3) in an ideal love the spiritual and the physical are inseparable. Often in dealing with inconstancy Donne sometimes assumes the position that variety is the spice of love. Sometimes his verse reflects an advocacy of "free-love." Some critics[2] contend that Donne's view of physical love simply constitute the exercise of his enormous wit while others[3] hold that these lascivious views add up to auto-biographical facts. Here let it suffice to say that Donne's poems are filled with sharply anti-Petrarchan elements, be they auto-biographical or intellectual.

In addition to treating his themes in an anti-Petrarchan manner, Donne also made use of a language that was anti-Petrarchan. Unger and O'Connor comment that "Donne's language is significant in the course of English poetry."[4] Donne's diction and grammatical structure are essentially con-

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[1] "The Anniversarie," ll. 7-10.

[2] See P. Legouis, Donne the Craftsman (New York, 1962), p. 36. Unger, Op. Cit., p. 38.

[3] See Gransden, Op. Cit., p. 56; Fausset, Op. Cit., p. 56; D. Louthan, The Poetry of John Donne (New York, 1951), p. 173.

[4] Unger and O'Connor, Op. Cit., p. 107.

versational in tone and texture. In this respect, he is often compared with Robert Browning and can, in a sense, be considered a sort of precursor of the dramatic monologue. At any rate, as a result of Donne's use of the spoken style of poetic diction, he is said to have carried into the poetry of love "the colloquail, dramatic, ironic realism that decorum had reserved for satire."[1]

Thus, Donne broke through the conventions and perfected an idiom strikingly his own. He abandoned the Elizabethan stereotypes of his day and wrote in speech patterns which were as straightforward as conversation. "The Canonization" begins with the harsh expression "For Godsake hold your tongue and let me love."[2] Another poem, "The Sunne Rising" opens with startling directness: "Busy old fool, unruly sun!"[3] Similarly, an elegy begins "Nature's lay ideot, I taught thee to love."[4] In many instances, Donne's verse also approaches the dramatic.[5] Often the drama unfolds itself through the talk of a speaker and in the apparent presence of another.

"The Good Morrow," "Woman's Constancy," "The Flea," and "Lover's Infinitenesse" are examples of poems of Donne's use of a dramatic conversational tone. Dramatic implications are obviously present in "The Good

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[1] Bush, Op. Cit., p. 57.

[2] "The Canonization," l. 13.

[3] "The Sunne Rising," l. 1.

[4] "Elegie VII," l. 1.

[5] P. Legouis, Op. Cit., p. 47.

Morrow," Here, a lover seems to be addressing his loved one. He asks her

> I wonder by my troth, what thou and I
> Did till we lov'd? Were we not wean'd till then.
> But suck'd on country pleasures childishly?
> Or snorted we in the seven sleepers den?[1]

He then answers his own question:

> T'was so; But this, all pleasures fancies bee.
> If ever any beauty I did see,
> Which I desir'd, and got, t'was but a dream of thee.[2]

Throughout the poem the impression is given that there is a listener and the presence of the listener is indicated by a reference to her. As, in the final stanza the poet writes "my face in thine eye, thine in mine appeares, / and true plaine hearts doe in the faces rest."[3] Here the impression is given that the lovers gaze into each other's eyes. Thus it appears that both the lover and his loved one are on the scene. The same can be said for "Woman's Constancy." The poet begins by having the speaker converse with the loved one; and although she does not reply, her presence is indicated by the flow of language in the poem. The poet writes

> Now thou hast lov'd me one whole day,
> Tomorrow when thou leav'st, what wilt thou say?
> Wilt thou then antedate some new-made vow?
> Or say that now
> We are not just those persons, which we were?[4]

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[1] "The Good Morrow," ll. 1-4.

[2] Ibid., ll. 5-7.

[3] Ibid., ll. 15-16.

[4] "Woman's Constancy," ll. 1-5.

The speaker continues his questioning and then finally states

> Vain lunatique, against these scrapes I could
> Dispute, and conquer, if I would,
> Which I abstaine to doe,
> For by tomorrow, I may think so too.[1]

Thus, it appears as if two characters are present in this dramatic presentation.

So far, the poems discussed have only two characters. "The Flea" appears to have two plus a dramatic device: a lover, the loved one and a flea. First of all, the man points to the insect which jumped from him to her

> Marke but this flea, and marke in this,
> How little that which thou deny'st me is
> It suck'd me first, and now sucks thee,[2]

He refers to the flea when he states

> And in this flea, our two bloods mingled bee;[3]

Then, the woman appears to be hunting the flea in order to kill it, and the speaker tries to dissuade her from putting it to death

> Oh stay, three lives in one flea spare
> Where wee almost, yea more than
> maryed are.[4]

In the last stanza it is related that the woman kills the flea.

In "Lover's Infinitenesse," the poet returns to two characters. The lover appears to speak to his loved one in a conversational tone. He speaks

> If yet I have not all thy love,
> Deare, I shall never have it all,[5]

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[1] Ibid., ll. 15-18.
[2] "The Flea," ll. 1-3.
[3] Ibid., l. 4.
[4] Ibid., ll. 10-11.
[5] "Lover's Infinitenesse," ll. 1-2.

The speaker declares his love for the loved one and finally states

> Thou canst not every day give me my heart,
> If thou canst give it, then thou never gave it,
> Love's riddles are, that though thy heart depart,
> It stayes at home, and thou with loving savest it:
> But wee will have a way more liberall,
> Than changing hearts, to joyne them, so wee shall
> Be one, and one another's all.[1]

Duncan states that Donne's choice of language in his verse reflects a fidelity to the truth of experience.[2] In any event, the poet's employment of the idiom of conversation in his poems constitutes a departure from the Petrarchan tradition.

One may conclude that Donne lived in a world which was witnessing the decay of an old way of thinking and was struggling to find a new way to establish itself.[2] In such a world truth was of utmost importance. Subsequently, Donne, according to Duncan, forgot beauty, preferring to it every form of truth.[3] Donne's poetry, then, becomes a sort of quest to discover something permanent and unchanging in a world of appearances. This quest may be labeled "a quest for truth."[4] As a result, much of Donne's poetry reflects a vivid realism. It is no wonder then that the Petrarchan tradition with its artificial glorification of women was rejected by a truth-seeking John Donne. With this poet a new era in the history of English love poetry began.

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[1] Ibid., ll. 27-33.

[2] J. E. Duncan, "The Revival of Metaphysical Poetry 1872-1912," PMLA, LXVIII, p. 68.

[3] Charles Coffin, John Donne and the New Philosophy (New York, 1937), p. 4.

[4] Duncan, Op. Cit., p. 668.

[5] M. Turnell, "John Donne's Quest for Unity," Commonweal, LVII (1952), p. 16.

SUMMARY

The Petrarchan style in English poetry faded with the appearance of John Donne on the literary scene, for in the latter's poetry there is no echo of either Petrarch's matter or manner. Having rejected the Petrarchan tradition with its too often merely extravagant and conventional adoration of women and its artificial language, Donne, to a great extent, infused English poetry with a certain type of emotional honesty and realism.

When one recognizes how general the acceptance of the Petrarchan tradition was among Elizabethan poets, Donne's rejection of this approach to writing verse becomes a singular fact in English literary history. For, most of the major writers of Elizabethan England employed the Petrarchan convention in their love poems. Writers such as Sidney, Spenser and even Shakespeare were essentially Petrarchan in their glorification of women in their poetry. William Shakespeare, however, apparently sensed the need for broadening the boundaries of the Petrarchan ideal and perhaps paved the way for Donne's revolt.

In retrospect, no times could have been better for Donne's Petrarchan revolt for the age was one of change. Donne's times were also the times of Galileo, Kepler, and Bacon. The defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588, the death of Queen Elizabeth in 1603 and James I's ascension to the throne within the same year all occurred during Donne's early career. In other words, Donne's revolution in poetry occurred during a time of revolution in scientific thought, political ideals, and religious practices.

Donne's poems stand, then, as ample proof of his revolt against the Petrarchan tradition. In revolting against tradition, he freed English poetry from artificiality and a restrictive traditionalism. Much of his verse expressed the truth of human experience and influenced realistic poetry down to modern times. Indeed in Donne's poetry, one finds a type of poetical expression that is forcefully original, emotionally honest, and dramatically dynamic.

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